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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 29 April 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. WARD (Canada)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

Statement by the Executive Director

1. Mr. GRANT (Executive Director) said that he noted two threads running through the Board's discussion: first, the feeling of accomplishing an exciting task; and second, an acute feeling that there was a need to balance the Fund's efforts in responding to what were frequently viewed as competing demands. UNICEF must attend to emergencies, and, at the same time, attack the fundamental causes of poverty. Goals must be set with respect to children and development, even as countries were being given the task of setting priorities. Service delivery must be expanded, even as the capacities of individuals and institutions were being strengthened. The pressing needs of the newly independent countries required a response, but one which did not result in the neglect of the needs of the developing countries. UNICEF needed to coordinate its activities with other agencies in the United Nations system, even as it preserved its focus and its comparative advantages.

2. All the speakers had expressed a desire to reconcile those seemingly incompatible goals. If UNICEF kept the needs of children firmly in sight, those goals would become not only compatible, but even complementary. There was a third idea that he had wished delegations had mentioned more frequently, particularly those from the industrialized countries, namely, the need to increase resources. There was more at issue than a question of choice between so-called "loud" or "silent" emergencies; sufficient resources should be available for both types of emergencies. It would be senseless to provide billions of dollars for peace-keeping and, at the same time, not be able to come up with the much smaller amounts that were necessary for humanitarian assistance. It would be irresponsible to tap into programme budgets in order to finance emergency assistance. If UNICEF acted in that way, it ran the risk of increasing the number of failed States, reversing the trend towards democracy and slowing down the struggle against the population explosion.

3. Before addressing the key questions, he emphasized how much he had been moved by the comments of many delegations in recognition of the work of UNICEF staff members in the field, particularly those who had given their lives to the cause of children. They were an extraordinary group of men and women and he was proud to be associated with them.

4. The swiftness with which a large number of States had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a tremendously encouraging development for all those who had worked hard over the years to promote, draft and enact that pioneering human rights instrument. In the future, assistance should be given to help Governments to incorporate into national laws the standards set out by the Convention, which could become the world's first "universal law".

5. In fulfilment of the promise that they had made at the World Summit for Children, the majority of developing countries had completed or were close to completing their national programmes of action (NPA). The NPAs were not merely inventories of actions to be taken, but central points of reference for the adoption of national policies for children and families. They had become parts

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of overall national development plans, and some countries had incorporated them into decentralization policy. Some NPAs had even survived changes in government. Furthermore, the identification of goals for 1995 would be very useful to Governments in channeling their efforts and in measuring their progress. The World Summit for Social Development, to be held in 1995, would provide an opportunity to prepare a mid-decade review.

6. As he had pointed out in his opening statement, it was not impossible to collect the resources required to reach the goals for the year 2000, as long as at least 20 per cent of the national budgets of developing countries and 20 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) from donor countries would be devoted to high-priority needs in the social sector. In that connection, there was concern that some of the main donors had decided to reduce their total UNICEF contributions as well as their overall assistance. He recalled the principle of the "first call" of children and reminded donors of the commitment they had made to see that the needs of children would be met, not just in times of prosperity, but in times of hardship as well. He appealed to them to re-examine their budgets in order to find a way to free up the needed resources. He offered his sincere thanks to countries that continued to pay per capita contributions up to twenty times the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) average. In contrast to the consensus that had emerged over the course of the session, the income projections for UNICEF were rather pessimistic; the increase was only 1.7 per cent. If the international community met the ODA target of 20 per cent, and if only 5 per cent of those resources passed through UNICEF, the Fund would record a 40 per cent increase in funding in future years. In addition, he was pleased that several delegations had agreed with him that the question of debt relief should be put on the agenda of the next summit meeting of the Group of Seven Industrialized Countries; the industrialized countries should seriously consider debt relief as a way of helping developing countries in their struggle against poverty. Any procrastination on the part of the industrialized countries could have tragic consequences and could plunge the international community once again into an era of confrontation between rich and poor nations.

7. While he welcomed the international community's new willingness to defend the right of people to food and security, he found it paradoxical that Governments were ready to commit billions of dollars to peace-keeping, yet were reticent with respect to financing humanitarian assistance. Moreover, resources required for emergency interventions should not be taken from resources for meeting the essential needs of the poorest people in the developing countries; such a course would inevitably result in new tensions and new civil wars, which, in turn, would result in new calls for emergency interventions.

8. The family planning document submitted to the Executive Board had encouraged UNICEF offices to cooperate more closely with other agencies such as UNFPA, and to emphasize respect for local attitudes and beliefs. The document had also emphasized that success in family planning depended not only on information and access to services, but also on basic education, particularly for girls, and improvements in health.

9. With respect to the donor evaluation of UNICEF, the analysis of the three principal intervention strategies (service delivery, capacity building and empowerment) appeared to meet with nearly unanimous agreement in the general

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debate. Some delegations viewed the Fund's advocacy activities on behalf of children as a fourth strategy or as a dimension of the first three strategies. Regarding the distinction made in the evaluation as between the Fund's role as a favoured partner or as a critical partner of Governments, he believed that those two roles were two sides of the same coin; precisely because UNICEF was a favoured partner of Governments, it could play a critical role and point out shortcomings. Nowherer was this double role more manifest than in the programming process, which began with a cricial evaluation of the situation in the country concerned.

10. The process of retructuring pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/199 had been prompted by the need to increase the effectiveness of the development cooperation activities of agencies in the United Nations system through increased coordination. However, as many speakers had pointed out, care should be taken to ensure that the reforms preserved the flexibility and rapid response capacities of agencies such as UNICEF.

11. In conclusion, he quoted the words of such illustrious and diverse personalities as Arnold Toynbee, Primo Levi, Henry David Thoreau, and Jean Monnet, whose thought had been a personal inspiration and also fitted in well with the principles underlying all of UNICEF's activities: the obligation to extend the benefits of civilization to the entire human species; the duty to provide succour to the suffering on pain of becoming an executioner oneself; the necessity of grounding even the most ambitious dreams on a solid foundation; and the will to resolve problems in a spirit of cooperation rather than confrontation. As Marion Wright Edelman, the principal advocate of the cause of children in the United States had said, meeting every human being's essential needs was the best way to inaugurate the new millennium that was approaching. He was convinced that every participant at the current session of the Executive Board had embraced that mission.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.